

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9134

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

USMISSION USUN NYK

CINCUER

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CORRECTED COPY (TEXT CORRECTED)

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652:N/A

TAS: MOPS, PBOR, SS MR

SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: INCIDENT IN NOUADHIBOU

1. SUMMARY: AN ACCIDENTAL GRENADE EXPLOSION ON MARCH 3 IN NOUADHIBOU STARTED A SERIES OF INCIDENTS WHICH ARE INDICATIVE OF A CERTAIN DEGREE OF TENSION IN THAT CITY IN THE WAKE OF THE FEBRUARY 25-27 EXPLOSION AND TRAIN DERAILMENT (REFTEL). TWO FOREIGN BUSINESS-MEN, AN EXPATRIATE TECHNICIAN AND FRENCH EMBOFF, IN SEPERATE CONVERSATIONS GIVE SIMILAR DESCRIPTION OF MARCH 3 EVENTS. END SUMMARY.

2. ON MARCH 3 A MUARITANIAN CIVILIAN IN THE MAIN LOCAL MARKET WAS PLAYING WITH THE SAFETY PIN OR DETONATOR OF A HAND GERNADE (HE APPARENTLY WAS UNFAMILIAR WITH THE DEVICE). WHEN THE GRENADE

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MECHANISM WAS TRIGGERED AND SUBSEQUENTLY DETONATED, SEVERELY WOUNDING THE CIVILIAN, BUT APPARENTLY NOT KILLING HIM, MAURITANIANS QUICKLY GATHERED EN MASSE AROUND THE SCENE. MOROCCAN AND MAURITANIAN TROOPS ARRIVED ON THE SCENE SOON AFTER THE EXPLOSION AND NOT KNOWING WHAT HAD ORIGINALLY HAPPENED, AND PERHAPS FEARFUL THAT A FURTHER INCIDENT MIGHT BE IN THE OFFING, ATTEMPTED TO DISPERSE THE CROWD. WHEN THESEWTTEMPTS FAILED, THEY FIRED

INTO HE AIR. THE CROWD PANICKED. MOREOVER, SOME OF THE ROUNDS FIRED INTO THE AIR ARE REPORTED TO HAVE FALLEN BACK INTO THE MARKET AREA, INJURING AN UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF PEOPLE. (THE ROUNDS PRESUMABLY WOULD HAVE BEEN FALLING AT "NORMAL" TERMINAL VELOCITY AND WOULD NOT HAVE HAD THE HIGHER MUZZLE VELOCITY EXISTING AT THE TIME OF FIRING.) ADDITIONALLY, ONE BLACK MAURITANIAN SOLDIER IS REPORTED TO HAVE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THE MELEE AND SHOT AND KILLED A MOORISH MAURITANIAN SOLDIER WITH WHOM HE HAD BEEN ARGUING PRIOR TO THE GRENADE INCIDENT. THE BLACK SOLDIER WAS ARRESTED.

3. FOLLOWING THE GRENADE INCIDENT AND THE ROUTE OF THE CROWD, THE GIRM AND MOROCCAN MILITARY ELEMENTS IN THE TOWN BEGAN A HOUSE-TO HOUSE SEARCH IN THE CENTRAL AREA FOR WEAPONS AND PERSONAL FIREARMS. THE SEARCH APPARENTLY TURNED UP A LARGE NUMBER OF PERSONALLY OWNED WEAPONS. (ACCORDING TO ONE INHABITANT OF NOUAKDHIBOU, THESE WEAPONS, WHILE UNREPORTED TO THE AUTHORITIES, ARE OF A MIXED VARIETY AND ARE OFTEN AS NOT NON-MILITARY IN NATURE.

THE PRESENCE IN MAURITANIAN HOMES IS NOT UNCOMMON.) THE WEAPONS WERE CONFISCATED AND THE OWNERS INTERROGATED BUT APPARENTLY NOT ARRESTED.

4. ACCORDING TO ONE BUSINESS MAN, THE FRENCH AT NOUADHIBOU HAVE TAKEN THE EVENTS OF THE PAST FEW WEEKS IN STRIDE AND REMAIN CALM. THE INCIDENTS, WHILE VISIBLE TO THE FRENCH, HAVE NOT YET AFFECTED
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THEM DIRECTLY. HE SAID THAT IN NOUADHIBOU ITSELF, TENSIONS ARE GROWING BETWEEN MAURITANIAN AND MOROCCAN TROOPS. THE MOROCCANS FEEL THAT THE MAURITANIANS ARE NOT COMPETENT OR WELL ORGANIZED AND ARE NOT TAKING SERIOUSLY ENOUGH FEBRUARY 26 EXPLOSION IN A DISCOTIQUE IN THE MOROCCAN HOTEL BARRACKS. SECURITY INSPECTION BY THE MILITARY ARE APPARENTLY AS IRKSOME TO THE LOCAL POPULATION AS THE INCIDENTS WHICH PRECIPITATED THE MEASURES.

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